

This short article is adapted from material New Creation Ministries uses to train leaders. If you work with individuals or groups struggling with sexual brokenness you may find this information helpful. If you are a struggler or the spouse of a struggler you may find some practical guidance here for yourself. If you are in any of these categories it is strongly advised that you do not treat this information as mere data to add to your “recovery knowledge.” It is crucial that you apply it conscientiously to your life with the help of wise counsel.
-R.W.

Our faulty God-image: secret barrier to healing

We all deal with distorted images of God. I do, you do and all of our clients do. It's not a question of “if,” but only “how much.” Ultimately whether it's solving the sin problem or solving every other problem—God is the answer. But *which* God? There are many to choose from (even within Christian circles), there is:

- The angry God
- The God who loves everybody, loves what they do and never judges anyone
- The LGBTQ God
- The God who watches us like a hawk
- The God who isn't really a person but a principle, force or wish fulfillment generator
- The God who hates the rich, powerful, corporate (mostly male) oppressors
- The God who only cares that we do it right
- The God who created sex to confuse and embarrass us
- The God who is too holy, distant and remote
- The God who is my buddy/co-pilot/bff
- The God within, higher self, cosmic consciousness
- The touchy-feely God
- The nice God who never offends anyone, never does anything shocking and never moves without permission from my denomination.
- The radical God who loves chaos and stress and won't let me get comfortable
- The healthy, wealthy, winner God who has no time for whiners, victims or losers

- The God of old people, children and abandoned pets
- The Republican/Conservative God
- The God who made the world then left us to figure it out
- The God of cold, hard reality
- The religious God (who only cares about rituals, beauty and traditions)
- The “not now” God (who did amazing miracles in the past and will do earth-shattering deeds in the future but is strangely impotent in the present).
- The ivory tower God (only known through philosophy and theology)
- “My” God (as in “My God would *never* do _____,” or “My God *only* gives _____.”)

Obviously we need God. But if our “god” is one of the aforementioned deities how will that help us? It won’t. To those of us who remake God into an image of our own choosing he says, “Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble (Jdg 10:14)!”

100% of the people who come to us have a distorted God-image. How can I say that? Number one, because we’re all sinners and sin has effected how we see God. And number two, because their acting out (whatever form it takes) shows that they don’t believe God is either capable or interested in meeting their needs so they’ve found this alternate way of meeting it themselves (which doesn’t really work of course).

When you begin looking into your client’s views of God they may tell you that they see him very clearly (example, “Oh I *know* God loves me.”). If your client has been taught well in their church or is a genuine student of Scripture they may be able to give you technically correct answers. Their answers may even be heart-felt, but as Paul said, “Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know (1 Cor 8:2).”

It is important that you show them the inconsistencies between the God of their theology and the God of their emotions. You might say something like, “Howard, you say that you know God is faithful yet whenever things get funky in your life you panic. What is that telling you about how you *really* see God?”

It’s common for people to be defensive at this point and say they’re only human, nobody’s perfect, we all have fears, etc. (all true). You must reassure them that you aren’t trying to be critical or go over their theology with a fine-toothed comb. You are giving them what may be a rare opportunity to see the God they *actually* have a relationship with. When they see *that* God most people are appalled. We’re not saying they don’t know the true God at all. And we’re not saying that everything they think about God is distorted and false.

We're saying that where God's face is disfigured or twisted in their vision they won't be able to trust him. They may have a relationship with him but if they see him through one of those weird fun house mirrors they won't feel safe with him. Our job (with the help of the Holy Spirit) is to expose the disfigured imposter in the mirror.

When their eyes are opened to this they often have a confusing mix of emotions hit them all at once. They feel shock: *Is that how I've seen God? No wonder I'm so messed up!* They feel shame: *How could I be so stupid? Why did I believe this for so long?* They can feel relief: *Ok. This explains some things. No wonder I haven't wanted to surrender to a god like that.* They will also feel bewildered: *Wait a minute! If I've seen God this way—why? How could I have been so off?*

At this point some review of their family history can be helpful. Often the God they've been interacting with looks a lot like their earthly father, mother or some other broken authority figure. This makes sense to some people. Others still won't be able to make the connection (no matter how well you explain it). No worries. Give them and the Holy Spirit time to work this out.

Going back to the drawing board. At some point in this particular counseling task it will become obvious that their God-image needs a whole new make-over. Better yet, maybe they shouldn't trust anything they've thought or felt about God until they've gone back and established who the real and true God is.

Now the question becomes: How do you do that? The answer is both simple and complex at the same time. Let me give you the simple part first: If we want to know who God is or what he's like all we have to do is look at Jesus. Period.

Jesus is not a revelation of God, he is God revealed. Jesus is not like the Father, he is identical to the Father (but still distinct from him). If Jesus does it or says it it's because the Father does it and says it. The person who says this most clearly is the Lord himself. Toward the end of their journey when one of his men asked Jesus to show him the Father this is what he said,

“Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?”

(Jn 14:9)

You might be saying, “So I have to go over the complexities of trinitarian theology with my clients or they won’t get healed?” In one sense—yes. You don’t have to get too technical but you do need to grasp this well enough to explain it intelligently to those you counsel.

Our clients will never have a clear view of God unless we can expose their faulty God-image and replace it with the truth. And the truth of God is found in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). Christ is God made approachable, knowable and relatable to men. We want them to see that the glorious Creator of the universe somehow shrunk himself down to our size. Our hope is that they catch a vision of the same one Thomas saw when he dropped to his knees in front of Jesus and said, “My Lord and my God (Jn 20:28)!”

This is no mere theology lesson. Unless our clients come to know the true God as he really is they will never know true healing, nor will they ever know their true selves. We want them to get it stuck in their heads and lodged in their hearts that Jesus is:

- The sum total of God
- The most intimate expression of God
- The perfect representation of God
- Every thought, word and deed of God in bodily form
- The one who answers every question about God
- The one who made the world but walked on it too
- The one who existed from all eternity before becoming man
- The one who said, “Let there be light.”
- Abraham’s Friend, Moses’s Master, the prophets’ inspiration, David’s Rock, the Apostles’ Teacher, the world’s Savior and the One who lives inside us now.

Once we have established this (or refreshed our clients in this truth) we get to the complex part (as if we haven’t been dealing in complexity!). The real complexity isn’t establishing the truth about God it is getting to know that God *personally*.

Our clients may remonstrate, “But I *do* know Christ!” This is where we may have to press our point. Ask them to tell you what Jesus is like. And do not accept vague categories. After all, if someone told you about their father, wife or best friend would they say that person is “loving,” “kind,” and “merciful”? If you pumped them for more information would they say, “Well, she’s also forgiving”?

If this is the best they can do you would assume they are either holding back information, don't have a way of describing what they've experienced or don't really have a *close* relationship with that person. Likewise in our relationship with God we may use the language of intimacy or want others to think we are close, but in reality have a relationship with him that is more distant than we realize.

When we know someone—when we are close to them—we see their personality. We know what makes them tick. We can immediately tell others what makes this person happy, or what makes them mad. We know what is important to them and what they would consider trivial. We have inside information. We have stories.

We don't get this close to someone overnight. It takes years, many adjustments and lots of growing. We pay a price for this kind of knowledge. If we know the Lord *like this* it has changed us—dramatically. It could do nothing else. We could still have areas of our lives that are weak or broken but we couldn't be living in ways that are diametrically opposed to everything our Friend is about (1 Jn 2:4, Tit 1:16; 1 Jn 3:6; 4:7-8). It's impossible.

Imagine if someone told you they were a beach bum and lived in a trailer only steps from the ocean. If they told you they were either surfing all day (without a wet suit), playing in the sand or laying on their towel wouldn't you expect them to have a killer tan? Now if that person was as white as a ghost you might want to believe them but it would be pretty hard wouldn't it?

Someone who spends years in the sun will be changed by it (unless they wear a hazmat suit). They will show the unmistakable signs of being a “sun worshipper.” The same is true if—for years—we've truly exposed ourselves to Jesus too. It will show in who we are and how we live. It can't be hidden. It can't be helped.

Sexual and relational addictions are proof that we do not know the Lord in some key areas of our soul. It is a crucial step to help our clients see this if they ever want to experience Jesus in those places too. And often those places in our soul are the deepest ones of all.

Lastly, regarding this issue of truly knowing Jesus I said that we should have intimate knowledge of him. If we have a personal relationship with him then we will be able to share personal things about him with others. If we don't know any of the specifics about his personality maybe it's because we have an *impersonal* relationship with him.

I don't say this to make anyone feel bad or “less than.” It simply underscores the fact that maybe we are using intimate language for a relationship that isn't intimate. If this is true for us or our clients there is good news: It doesn't have to stay that way! We can actually

come into this level of friendship with God. We don't have to settle for second-hand knowledge or a distant association with occasional moments of euphoria. God has never wanted acquaintances:

“Repent at my rebuke!
Then I will pour out my thoughts to you,
I will make known to you my teachings.”
(Prov 1:23)

“Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.”
(Is 58:9)

“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable
things you do not know.”
(Jer 33:3)

“You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants,
because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called
you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to
you.”
(Jn 15:14–15)

“The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known
to them.”
(Ps 25:14)